

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE BANE OF PRIVATE PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The paper examined lack of accountability in relation to private participation in Nigerian public universities. The tremendous decline in the public funds made available to universities and astronomical increase in the student enrolment in the last few decades are some of the major factors responsible for the acute shortage of necessary infrastructural facilities, unpleasant learning environments and low quality of university graduates. These developments call for active involvement of all stakeholders like individuals, philanthropists, religious organisations, alumni associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the organised private sector in the financing and development of Nigerian ivory towers. However, issues such as lack of transparency, non-compliance with the ethical standards, abuse of office, improper maintenance of facilities, inability to take the right decisions at the right time, failure to give stakeholders feedback on management of resources, on the part of university administrators constitute major hindrances to private participation in the provision of funds and materials required for the development of Nigerian public universities. Therefore, the paper recommends that university administrators should embrace openness, honesty and transparency in the management of government-owned universities, utilise available resources efficiently and be accountable to all stakeholders in order to motivate the participation of members of the public.

Keywords: Accountability, Private Participation, Nigerian public universities, public funds.

Introduction

The shortage of public funds made available for education in recent times, especially at the tertiary education level, calls for increased private participation in the provision of financial and material resources. As Idialu and Idialu (2012) noted, the allocation of public funds to the education sector has been reduced tremendously. As the number of institutions and the student enrolment increase, the funds demand also increases. This situation probably makes it challenging for the government to finance education alone. The low public funds allocation to education has affected the supply of other resources in Nigerian public universities, contributing significantly to decadence at this level of education.

National Universities Commission (NUC, 2004) observed that physical facilities for teaching and learning in the government universities are inadequate, dilapidated, overstretched and improvised. Also, laboratory and workshop equipment as well as consumable materials are either absent, inadequate or outdated. Kerosene stoves are being used as bunsen burners in some public universities, while some engineering workshops operate under zinc sheds and trees. International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP, 2007) argued that from the mid-1980s, government funding of higher education arguably began to diminish. In spite of the continuous increase in government expenditure at both federal and state levels, the percentage of its allocation to education has not met the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's recommendation of 26 per cent. Despite this situation, private participation in the development of higher education has been very low in the last few decades. As a result of the indifferent attitudes of the private sector, Nigerian public universities seem to be operating under the siege of decay. Much of the necessary equipment is either not there or merely existing. World Bank (1994), Ochuba (2001) and NUC (2004) observed that, during the accreditation exercise, some departments have been noted for borrowing equipment in order to scale through the accreditation exercise.

The potential of university education in Nigeria to fulfil the responsibility of construction of knowledge economy and society remains unachieved owing to long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance, among others. Also, Nigerian

public universities find it challenging to produce graduates well equipped with skill and value system capable of making them self-reliant in addition to being unrefined in character. In the words of Ayanyemi (2015), the low performance of Nigerian universities in the Scimago Institution Ranking (SIR) World Report for 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 is a product of inadequacies in the financial and material resources available for the running and development of university education. The various developments already analysed call for government-private partnership in the funding and development of tertiary institutions, and the provision of necessary infrastructures, not only in Nigeria, but also across the globe since government finds it challenging to shoulder this responsibility alone.

It is unfortunate that members of the public, who hitherto contributed to the development of universities, now feel that this responsibility should be borne by the government alone. The high level of dishonesty and corruption by the top echelon of public universities is a source of discouragement to the private sector in contributing to developmental projects. Adesoji and Oni (2010) argued that effort to improve the university system, management and governance, to make it more responsive and accountable to the members of the public have been thwarted by a pervasive culture of corruption in Nigeria. At the end of the 20th century, corruption was noted to have become endemic to a good number of individuals, organizations, and institutions of learning. This was largely attributed to a long tradition of weak governance, oversight, low managerial capacity and lack of accountability during the long period of military rule. The situation was terrible to the extent that the Global Corruption Watchdog Organization, Transparency International (2000) ranked Nigeria as the world's most corrupt nation. More recently, Nigeria's level of corruption, as depicted in Tables 1 and 2, is worrisome.

Table 1: Nigeria Position in the Global Corruption Ranking for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015

Year	No. of Countries Ranked	Nigeria's Position
2011	177	143 rd
2012	176	139th
2013	177	144th
2014	175	136th

2015	176	136th
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Source: Various Publications of Transparency International

Table 2: Nigeria Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015

Year	CPI
2011	2.4
2012	2.7
2013	2.5
2014	2.3
2015	2.0

Source: Various Publications of Transparency International

As Adesoji and Oni (2010) asserted, social malignancy was also extended to the public universities. Arguably, corruption in Nigeria is not limited to the political class or town alone, several forms of corruption and immoral acts, including extortion, admission racketeering, sexual abuse, contract kickbacks, intellectual laziness, lack of concentration on research and unhealthy rivalry, are taking place everywhere.

Therefore, the intent of this paper is to examine the implications of the indifferent attitudes of public university administrators to openness and accountability on the participation of individuals and the organized private sector in the development of the Nigerian ivory towers and the need for the public university managers to improve on their present level of stewardship.

Accountability

There are different ways of conceiving accountability, depending on the situation and the society. Accountability can be described as the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect. Dykstra (1939) asserted that, in ethics and governance, accountability means answerability, blameworthiness, liability and the expectation of account giving. As an aspect of governance, it has been central to discussions related to problems in the public sector, non-profit, private and individual contexts. Williams (2006) opined that, in leadership roles, accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of

responsibility for actions, products, decisions and policies, including administration, governance and implementation within the scope of the role or employment position, which encompass the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the resulting consequences.

In governance, accountability has expanded beyond the mere definition of being called to account for one's action. According to Sinclair (1995), it is frequently referred to as an act of giving leadership between individuals in the areas of giving information, taking actions and decisions, justification of one's actions and subjecting the party that is involved in misconduct to necessary punishment. Accountability relates to the existence of relationship involving at least two parties wherein one party is responsible to another in his or her actions (Enefiok, 2007). Accountability cannot exist without proper accounting practices. In other words, an absence of accounting implies non-existence of accountability (Schedler, 1999). The fundamental issues, such as who is to be held accountable, for what, to whom, through what means and with what consequences, are of paramount importance in accountability. Depending on the nature of the obligation, accountability can be at odds within the confidentiality of sensitive issues, like decisions on personnel, preliminary discussions about the treatments and units, and of financial stringency within colleges and universities. External accountability is described as the obligation of colleges and universities to their supporters, and ultimately to society, to provide assurance that they are pursuing their resources honestly and responsibly and that they are meeting legitimate expectations (Trow, 1996).

Goetz (1988) described accountability as the recording and reporting of the activities and events affecting personnel, facilities, materials or money of an organisation and its programmes. It means having responsibility for, or reporting to others on something, usually funds, materials or personnel utilised in an organisation. Thus, parents who hitherto took for granted that schools were doing the best they could are now demanding from schools to account for the failure of their children through parent-teacher association.

Educational administrators now use the concept to describe the nature, sources and amounts of revenue inputs; the appropriation of revenues to various programmes and the actual expenditures involved. These data are then related to educational inputs or benefits so that

the citizens can understand the financial implications of educational decisions and the programme implications of financial decisions. Thus, the educational managers are accountable to the parents, guardians, individual stakeholders and society at large (Durosaro, 1998). In this way, it becomes easier for this set of stakeholders to have the information on which to exercise their decision-making power in the areas of financial policy. Therefore, there is need to ensure that the focus of accountability is more on the process of instruction because this is the centre of accountability.

In the field of education, there are three main types of accountability systems: compliance with regulations; adherence to professional norms; and, result driven. According to Ogundele (2015), accountability is linked to the management of scarce resources available in the educational system through efficient and prudent utilisation of such resources for achieving educational goals. Accountability describes a relationship between two parties in which four conditions apply: first, one party expects the other to perform a service or accomplish a goal; second, the party performing the activity accepts the legitimacy of the other's expectation; third, the party performing the activity derives some benefits from the relationship; and, fourth, the party for whom the activity is performed has some capacity to affect the other's benefit.

Private Participation

Private participation is the involvement of parents, communities, societies, non-governmental organisations, alumni associations, religious organisations, philanthropists and individuals in the funding and development of public universities (Ayanyemi, 2015). Mehunu (2012) noted that private participation in public universities is a deliberate process by which interested members of the public, civil society organisations and other stakeholders are involved in the affairs and development of public universities. Wang and Wart (2007), opined that private participation is the involvement of members of the public in the provision of funds; structures, such as lecture theatres, student hostels, libraries, workshops; facilities, like sport materials, laboratory chemicals and equipment; planning of university programmes; and curriculum development. To Wohlster (2006), participation may take

the form of facility maintenance, management services and curriculum development.

The importance of private participation includes: assessment of student education needs and evaluation of the adequacy of the curriculum. It is collaboration between the university management and the private sector that contributes to problem solving with the goal of achieving more of the objectives set for the university (Kim and Lee, 2012). This means that the participants actively participate in an initiative and action that are inspired by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control. In this respect, Siphuma (2009) contended that what constitutes popular participation is a collaborative effort by the participants to pool their efforts and resources for the attainment of the set goals. In other words, the major aim of seeking the involvement of the private individuals and the organised private sector in education at any level is to ensure that each institution of learning has financial and material resources necessary for functional teaching and learning.

In order to sustain the quality and standard of public universities in Nigeria, all stakeholders, government at all levels, parents, guardians, the organised private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the society in general must be involved. In line with this, Owojori and Iware (2011) asserted that the planning and funding of education require the contribution of all, if Nigeria must progress at her present level of development. Non-instructional activities, building maintenance, student transport and school hostel accommodation are very costly for public universities to maintain (World Bank, 2009).

Issue of Accountability

Lack of accountability among most of public university administrators is a major concern to all and sundry. The inability of members of the public to access the necessary feedback on the important activities of government-owned universities is a major setback for their active involvement in the development of universities. The public deserves the right to know the extent to which the goals of a particular university have been achieved. The extent to which the resources available have been utilised to serve the educational attainment of the students are part of the important information that must be made available to the

public. Sofoluwe, Oduwaiye, Ogundele and Kayode (2015) assert that the need for university management to be accountable to the public partly lies in the fact that universities are funded by society through tax payment. Non-disclosure of information that has to do with resource availability and utilisation may prevent individuals and the entire public from knowing where and when help is required. When assistance is sought, in many cases, people who care to offer it may after all not know what was done with such donations or gifts. Ihuonumekwu, Edith and Ndidi (2014) claim that indication of better school governance, transparency and lack of institutional corruption encourage private donations.

Private participation cannot be at divergence with genuine accountability. Just like in the business world, importance must be attached to university accountability. In the words of Okebukola (2006), responsive university system have been moving towards business-like forms of management and governance, with accountability, quality assurance and performance as the watchword. Ejere (2012) affirmed that lack of accountability in the management of the public sector in Nigeria has remained a critical issue. He attributes this development to the emergence of democratic rule in 1999. The fact that the Nigerian public service is characterised by poor culture of accountability is a major concern to all and sundry. Nigeria is a country where corruption has become endemic and a way of life to the extent that officials are not only corrupt, but also corruption is official. One of the major issues facing higher education in Nigeria is lack of accountability and this appears as a major factor that hinders the involvement of members of the public in the financing and development of government-owned universities. In the opinion of Altbach (2005), the growing number of dishonest higher education administrators is threatening the entire academic enterprise.

Issue of Private Participation

The degeneration of private participation in the funding and general development of education, especially at the university level, is a major setback for public universities in Nigeria. Owing to this development, the quality of education leaves much to be desired, resources necessary for effective teaching and learning are grossly inadequate and the skills

acquired by a larger percentage of university graduates and their capacities to meet the dictates of the world of work are questionable. The private individuals and religious organisations that contributed meaningfully to the development of public universities are now interested in the establishment of their own private universities for the purpose of profit-making. Although, some private universities do not have what it takes to be in operation, their establishment in the last few decades is on the increase. The number of students seeking admission into such universities is quite more than the maximum number that the school can admit because of the problem of access to the public universities occasioned by their inadequate facilities and subsequent low carrying capacities.

The takeover of primary and secondary schools in the 1970s and the federalisation of all universities in 1975 by the federal government marked the beginning of the decline in the direct involvement of the private individuals and the organised private sector in the development of education, especially at the tertiary level. For example, the report of the Association of African Universities (AAU) of 1990 revealed that the government contributed 92% of funding of universities in Nigeria, with the private sector and internally generated revenue (IGR) probably contributing the remaining 8%, which is significantly low. Adebakin and Ajadi (2014) observed that the government provides as much as 84% of funds available to the Nigerian public universities, while the remaining 16% is shared among other sources that are collectively called IGR. Specifically, endowments contribute 1.4%, while external aids and grants provide 1.1%.

The issue of low private participation in the development of schools is a worrisome phenomenon, as a large percentage of the members of the school community and parents have not been very supportive in their attitudes (Abiodun-Oyebanji, 2014). In the words of Odebiyi and Aina (1999), owing to Nigeria's face-off with the United Nations (UN) over non-democratic principles in governance, and a bad record of human rights ideals, many institutions, such as International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Commonwealth Scholarship, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and British Council have

withdrew their funds and have stopped supporting researches and programmes in Nigerian public universities. This, in particular, followed the sanctions the UN took against the Nigerian government under military dictatorship in the 1980s. Salako (2012) attributed the withdrawal of grants in the 1970s by the international organisations to the Nigeria's oil wealth which gave the impression that such aids were no longer necessary.

The Need for Accountability in Nigerian Public Universities

Accountability requires the obligations of an office-holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. In other words, it emphasises the need for the evaluation of the results or achievements of an office-holder. Thus, the authority of a particular public university is expected to shun all corrupt practices, to be accountable to the proprietor, the parents, staff, students and members of the public, at large, for the material, financial and human resources being managed from time to time (Adenugba, 2013). Accountability is not limited to the ability to report on financial data in line with the general accepted accounting principles. Also, it requires strict compliance with the ethical standards specified by a recognised regulatory body. One of the needs for accountability is its capacity to build the societal confidence in the duties being discharged by the university management. In the opinion of Dawood (2014), accountability prevents the leader from the possibility of involvement in corruption, abuse of office, inefficient use of resources, performing duties in a manner contrary to the rules and regulations that guide the university management and improper maintenance of facilities. Also, it helps in the best selection of programmes and taking the right decisions at the right time; and at the same time prepares the person involved adequately for the justification of his actions.

Adenugba (2013) asserts that good governance and accountability are sine qua non to effective development and social order, with particular relation to Nigerian society. She attributes the need for the existence and development of an establishment to efficient management of resources, accountability, welfare schemes, and a climate free of corrupt practices. The development of a particular university is not likely to happen dramatically. The people in the position of authority must be seen connecting the appropriate set of

agencies, groups and individuals, for the purpose of efficient management of material, human and financial resources. They should be able to give the different classes of stakeholders feedback on how these resources have been used and the results obtained. As development has direct association with good governance and is a component of good governance, accountability cannot be left out whenever development is being envisaged.

In the view of McGee and Graventa (2010), transparency and accountability have emerged over the past few decades as key ways to address both development failures and democratic deficit. In the development context, the argument is that, through greater accountability, corruption and inefficiency are highly discouraged; assistance is likely to be received more naturally, while development initiatives are likely to produce greater and more visible results. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) averred that faithful implementation of development plan, commitment on the part of the leaders and absence of corrupt practices are the bedrock for sustainable development. Undoubtedly, development has association with the quality of university outputs. Before development can take place, funds and physical facilities must be sufficiently available for both the theoretical and practical work for the various categories of students.

Accountability has implications for quality assurance. The National Universities Commission (NUC) requires each university to meet the basic minimum academic standard by having in place acceptable level of resources, especially physical facilities. Thus, the university authority must be proactive in the activities that guarantee sufficient availability and efficient utilization of resources necessary for the successful attainment of the educational goals. As Sofoluwe, Oduwaiye, Ogundele and Kayode (2015) argued, the ever-increasing needs of the universities and the dwindling resources available to them have forced university managements to seek innovative ways of ensuring the survival of their universities. This can be achieved through proper accountability of the educational goals, programmes and productivity measurement. Mandina and Chiheve (2013) opined that school heads should form partnership with the private sector in order to secure funding. There may not be effective public-private partnership (PPP) without reliable transparency. That is, meaningful PPP is anchored to appropriate level of accountability on the part of the

school authority. Accountability plays significant roles in a democratic control, enhancing the integrity of public finance, supporting performance improvement, maintaining and enhancing the relief of tension (Levitt, Janta and Wegrich, 2008).

Summary

The recent dwindling allocation of public funds to education sector and upsurge in the student enrolment call for increased participation of all categories of members of the public. This is necessary because such a development has negative influence on other infrastructural facilities necessary for the development of effective university education. Further undesirable effects of the situation are the questionable skill acquisition and subsequent low quality of the beneficiaries of university education.

Dishonesty, involvement in corruption, lack of accountability, openness, abuse of office, inefficient use of resources, low managerial capacity for curriculum development and review, failure to take right decisions at the right time and inability to make best selection of programmes on the part of university administrators tend to discourage members of the public from contributing meaningfully to the development of public universities.

The seemingly inability of university administrators to justify their stewardship and leadership roles is a bad signal to members of the public and at the same time constitute major reasons for not having much support of individuals and organisations for public universities. It is not uncommon to hear cases of extortion, admission racketeering, sexual abuse, contract kickbacks, intellectual laziness, lack of concentration on research, in nearly all the public universities. Administrators of public universities are expected to record all activities and events affecting personnel, facilities, materials, money and programmes of their respective universities for the purpose of accountability. Equally, utilisation of available resources as well as reporting to parents, guardians, other stakeholders and the entire society, build the societal confidence in the duties being discharged by universities proper management and more importantly overcome development failures must be taken serious. Arguably, meaningful public-private partnership between universities and members of the

public can be envisaged only in situations where university administrators demonstrate reliable accountability and transparency.

Conclusion

The gross reduction in the public funds and the ever-increasing student enrolment are the major hindrances facing the management of Nigerian public universities. The total budget allocation to education generally during the last few years was far below the 26% recommendation of UNESCO. The actual percentage of the budget allocation to university education is another issue. A serious matter is the actual fraction of the percentage of funds allocated to university education that is expended at the end of the day. These developments necessitate the active involvement of other stakeholders, such as individuals, parents, communities, alumni associations, religious organisations, non-governmental organisations and the organised private sector, in the provision of funds and physical facilities required for the development of public universities. It is, however, perturbing that these sets of people are not normally motivated to play these crucial roles owing to the lack of openness, transparency and honesty usually exhibited by the public university administrators. It is, therefore, exigent that public university authorities must, as a matter of importance, embrace genuine accountability in order to encourage the various categories of stakeholders to contribute to the financial and material resources required for the development of Nigerian public universities.

Recommendations

In view of the negative effects which lack of accountability has on private participation in public universities, the following recommendations are hereby made.

Administrators of public universities should make use of effective means of rendering genuine stewardship to members of the public. In other words, administrators of universities should always be ready to be accountable for every action taken. The authorities of public universities should always seek intervention from private individuals, philanthropists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the organised private sector for the purpose of improving the learning environments of public universities.

As much as possible, university managers should shun corruption, embrace transparency and openness in all aspects of administrative functions. Also, public universities should place emphasis on community service. Paying appropriate attention to community service is likely to serve as motivation to individuals and the organised private sector to contribute significantly to the development of government owned universities.

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