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## CONTENTS

Man and Environment in Yoruba Religion Implications for Education	<i>TAIWO, Babawale Solomon</i>	519-528
Evaluation of Resource Acquisition Techniques for Educational Development- Imperatives for Strategic Planning	<i>Akor, Abba Innocent &amp; Udida, Ambekeh Alfred</i>	529-537
Parental Behaviour and Adolescent School Outcome: A Study of Senior High Students in the Akuapem North District of Ghana	<i>Stephen Antwi-Danso &amp; Alex Kwao</i>	539-545
Employers' Perceptions of The Employability Skills of New Graduates in Nigeria	<i>ALUKO, Yetunde. A.</i>	547-556
An Examination of Marxian and Weberian Perspectives on Social Stratification and Their Relevance to Educational Opportunities In Nigeria	<i>Amali, I. O. O; Mrs. Hassan M. R. and Akintola, M. &amp; Amuda, Robinson</i>	557-564
Towards Assuring Quality in Private Universities in Nigeria	<i>Arikewuyo, M.Olalekan &amp; Ilusanya, Gboyega</i>	565-569
Ensuring Effective School Growth Through Teacher Development and Retraining	<i>Asodike, Juliana D &amp; Sergeant-Awuse Victoria D</i>	571-576
Influence of Quality of Life on Student Achievement	<i>Jolita Dudaitė</i>	577-583
Educational Inputs and Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Edo State, Nigeria	<i>C.O. Duze, M. Okosun &amp; R.O. Ogbah</i>	585-593
Effective Human Resource Utilization in the Administration of Public Junior Secondary School Education in Rivers State	<i>ESEYIN, Emmanuel Olorunleke LENE, Barine &amp; EMENI, Jonathan Efe</i>	595-605
Taste and Musical Preferences in the Context of Music Education	<i>Libor Fridman</i>	607-617
Relationship between Self-Esteem, Reading Ability and Academic Achievement of School Children	<i>Iretor-Oscar Oluwaseun Bamidele</i>	619-625
Private Universities and Human Capital Development in Nigeria: An Analysis of Growth, Benefits and Challenges in a Knowledge-Demanding Economy	<i>Isuku, Eragbai Jerome</i>	627-633
Reasons for Adults' Participation in Non-Formal Education: A Brief Overview of Lithuanian Situation	<i>Jūratė Butvilienė &amp; Malgorzata Przybysz-Zaremba &amp; Tomas Butvilas</i>	635-639
The Factors of Secondary Victimization of the Children that have Experienced Sexual Abuse	<i>Brigita Kairienė &amp; Jolita Juškevičienė</i>	641-648
Self-Directed Learning in a Perspective of Transformative Learning Theory	<i>Aušra Kolbergytė &amp; Valdona Indrašienė &amp; Raminta Bardauskienė</i>	649-658
Music and Movement Activities and their Impact on Musicality and Healthy Development of a Child	<i>Maciej Kołodziejcki &amp; Paed Dr. Eva Králová &amp; Paed Dr. Jana Hudáková</i>	659-669

The Influence of the Self-concept on a Marital Interaction	<i>Darina Koskina</i>	671-675
Implications for Programme Planning Techniques in Nigerian Universities	<i>Bright Chima Megbo Innocent Abbah Akor Benjamin Umar Abdullahi Danjuma Kudu Abigail Ifeoma Iroegbu &amp; Saka Abdulganiyu</i>	677-682
Teachers' Perception of Social Dialogue as an Instrument for Effective Conflict Management in Nigeria Union of Teachers, Oyo State	<i>Momoh, A.M. &amp; Nwogu, G.A.</i>	683-689
Effectiveness of Nigeria's Lingua Franca in the Educational System	<i>Ofodu, Graceful Onovughe Adeniyi-Egbeola &amp; Folakemi Oyeyemi</i>	691-697
Education as a Tool for Enhancing Professionalism in the Nigeria Police	<i>Orutugu Ikioye</i>	699-705
Sociolinguistic Variations in the English Usage of Igbo-english Bilinguals	<i>Peace Chinwendu Israel</i>	707-719
The Sensemaking of the Role of Field Placement Supervisors of Social Work Students in Child- and Youth-oriented Social Service Organisations	<i>Alina Petrauskienė &amp; Rita Raudeliūnaite</i>	721-731
Evaluation of School Managers' Political Skills Through Teacher Opinions: The Case of Kocaeli/Turkey	<i>Tuğba Konaklı</i>	733-740
Freedom and Creativity as a Base Prerequisite of Teaching Subject <i>Music Ensembles</i>	<i>Mgr. František Turák, CSc.</i>	741-744
Motivation and Staff Performance in Secondary Schools in Benue State, Nigeria	<i>Anthanasius Aernan Yawe &amp; Atokaa Felicia</i>	745-751
Music and Dramatization in Alcoholic Prevention of the Youth	<i>Waldemar Ziarek, M.A.</i>	753-758
Myths and Realities Associated with Development, Poverty and Food Security in Africa: The Case of Ghana	<i>Emmanuel Kwesi Boon &amp; Millicent Nken-Anh Iddrisu</i>	759-773

## **PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF GROWTH, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN A KNOWLEDGE-DEMANDING ECONOMY**

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*In Nigeria private universities have exhibited an impressive growth over the past one and half decades, becoming one of the fastest growing higher education systems in the country. The number of private registered universities in the country increased from three in 1999 to fifty in 2012 representing 27.5% annual growth rate while enrolment also increased from just 653 in 2000/2001 session to 59,022 students in 2008/2009 session indicating an increased enrolment of 58,269 students during the period. However, despite these positive trends in the industry, the HCI for Nigeria has continued to pale into insignificance when compare with other similar countries. Thus, threatening the country's drive towards achieving sustained economic growth by the year 2020. Having x-rayed the prospects and challenges confronting private universities and human capital development in Nigeria, this paper suggests possible ways to improve private universities' contribution to the human capital production with the potential to increase economic productivity in the country.*

**Key words:** Higher education, private universities, Human Capital, student's enrolment

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Private providers of university Education have been playing significant role in contributing to the human capital production which is needed for social and economic development. Although, private university education in Nigeria began about one and a half decades ago, its share in terms of number of institutions and student's enrolment has grown rapidly over the period. With just three universities in 1999, the total number of registered private universities reached fifty by 2012 (National Universities Commission NUC [www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 2012) representing about 27.6% annual growth rate during the period. This has made private universities to become one of the fastest growing forms of higher institutions in the country. Similarity, as the demand to improve access and quality increase, the system equally responded positively over the past few years. For instance, the total private university enrolment increased from 24,544 students in 2006 to about 60,000 students in 2010 (Federal Ministry of Education (FME) 2011).

According to Haddad (2008), the role of Higher education (to which universities form the most significant unit), is manifested in its responsibility of producing the manpower needed for service delivery to the individual and the society at large. This important role of manpower production by universities provided the basis for the expansion of private universities in Nigeria in attempt to complement the efforts of the public universities. Moreover, the adverse economic realities facing the country as well as the belief that government alone cannot afford to provide the needed access to all prospecting students had led to the development of private universities in the Nigeria (see also Okogie, 2010).

### **TRENDS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

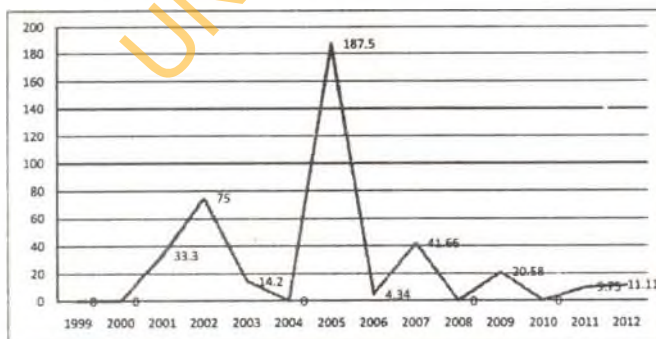
According to Okogie (2010), the promulgation of Decree 9 of 1993 gave way for the provision and establishment of private Universities in Nigeria. Obviously, this decree was based on the failure of

public universities to provide the needed access to the growing demand for university education in the country. Consequently, in 1999, three private universities namely; Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State; Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State were established (see National Universities Commission NUC, [www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 2012). By 2004 (five years after) the total number of private universities in the country had reached eight (8), while it increased to 34 in 2008 and 50 in 2012 (NUC [www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 2012). As a response to this growth, students' enrolment into private universities increased from about 650 in 2000/2001 academic session to 19,000 in 2004/05 academic year (NUC, [www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 2012). During the 2008/09 academic year, enrolment into private universities stood at 59,022

**Table 1**  
**Private Universities Growth in Nigeria (1999-2012)**

S/N	Year Established	Number of University established	increase	% Growth
1	1999	3	-	0
2	2000	3	-	0
3	2001	4	1	33.3
4	2002	7	3	75
5	2003	8	1	14.2
6	2004	8	-	0
7	2005	23	15	187.5
8	2006	24	1	4.34
9	2007	34	10	41.66
10	2008	34	-	0
11	2009	41	7	20.58
12	2010	41	-	0
13	2011	45	4	9.75
14	2012	50	5	11.11

Source: Author's Computation from data obtained from [www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 7/3/12



**Figure 1: Percentage Growth Rate of Private Universities in Nigeria (1999 - 2012)**

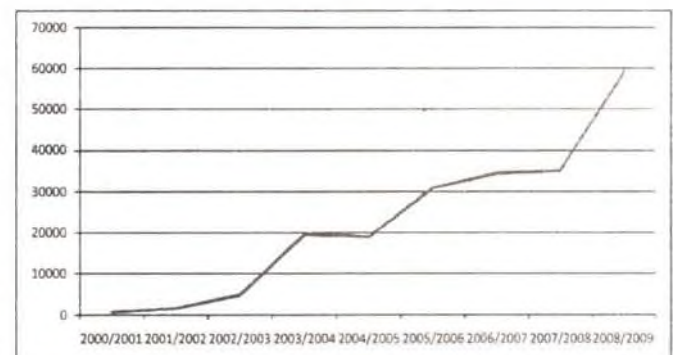
Table 1 shows the pattern of growth in the establishment of private universities in the country. In 2005, the total number of private universities increased to 23 from the existing 8 in the preceding year 2004 representing an additional 15 private universities from 2004 to 2005. The number further increased by 10 in 2007 totaling 34 private universities while it stood at 45 in 2011.

**Table 2**  
**Trend in Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Nigeria (2000-2009)**

S/N	Academic Year of	Total students enrolment	enrolment increase
1	2000/2001	653	-
2	2001/2002	1593	940
3	2002/2003	4,877	3,284
4	2003/2004	19,651	14,774
5	2004/2005	18,999	-652
6	2005/2006	30,953	11,954
7*	2006/2007	34,454	3,501
8	2007/2008	35,128	704
9	2008/2009	59,022	23,894

Source: Computed from data obtained from NUC.[www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng) 20/7/2013

\*Note: 2006/2007 academic year figure was based on extrapolation due to lack of reliable data



**Figure 2: Trend in Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Nigeria (2000-2009)**

Table 2: Show that there was a consistent positive increase in student enrolment over the period under consideration except during the 2004/2005 academic year when the number of students enrolled decreased by 652 students. reason for such decrease may not be unconnected with the problem of accreditation which sometimes negatively affects students' intake in some universities. The table revealed an increase of about 15,000 students in 2003/04 academic session. Total student enrolment stood at over 59, 000 in 2008/2009 academic year.

enrolment and subsequently of achieving a reasonable human development index. According to the World Bank (2002) in Isuku (2007), there is strong doubt that most developing countries like Nigeria could achieve the Millennium Development Goals without a strong tertiary education system of which the university is the most significant. Akpotu and Akpochafo (2009) citing UNESCO 2004 explained that raising university enrolment to between 25 and 45 percents for age 18-20 in any population, is necessary for any nation to increase the stock of its human capital which is a strong factor for economic growth. Thus, the presence of private universities helped to improve the rate of access which would have been difficult for government institutions alone to bear.

### **Increasing Competition in the Market for Quality Education**

The presence of privately owned and controlled universities serves as a strong argument for improving the quality of graduate and hence respond to the market demand for the high level manpower in the labour market. As the private sector gets involved in the provision of university education, the scramble for intake and provision of quality graduate become competitive. Involvement of the private sector is often promoted as an innovative means of improving quality of education. Some experts have argued that competition for students will lead to efficiency gains, as university (private and public) compete for students and try to improve quality, while at the same time reducing educational cost (Lewis and Patrinos, 2012; Hoxby, 2003b and Neal, 2002). This competition for students between the private and public institutions would give room for innovation and thus bring about the much needed improvement to the entire learning process.

### **Enhancing Economic growth and Wellbeing of the Immediate Locality**

The establishment of private universities led to the development of local economy activities. Through the various economic activities due from the citing of university in a particular locality, employment and income is generated thereby helping to improve the purchasing power of the local residents and its environs and hence the overall social-economic wellbeing of the people. The location of university in an area could spring up other forms of allied or even non-allied businesses. For instance, such business as food vendor, books and stationeries

sales, research activities, building and construction and mechanized farming etc could develop due to the presence of a university in a particular locality (see Isuku and Emunemu, 2012)

## **CHALLENGES FACING PRIVATE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

In Nigeria, the University education system and in particular, private universities is bedeviled with a lot of varying challenges. These challenges range from social, political, economic and even managerial among others. Specifically, some of the challenges facing private university development in Nigeria include:

### **The Problem of Limited Carriage Capacity of Private Universities**

Despite the growth in private university education in Nigeria, the challenge of a carriage capacity is high. Most private universities in the country lack the capacity to absorb the growing number of university education demand. This is due mainly to the fact that most of these universities have limited facilities and programmes to accommodate the growing number of persons demanding for private university education. Thus, the National Universities Commission at different times impose enrolment limit on most of the private universities in the country. For instance, during the 2011/2012 admission year, the total permissible limit into the existing 44 private universities in the country was 39,63 representing an average enrolment about 890 students per university. This is quite insignificant when compared with the already developed public universities with average enrolment of about 24,000 students per school (Isuku and Emunemu, forthcoming).

### **Access Barrier Due to High Fees Charged by Private Universities**

Most private universities in Nigeria charge very higher exorbitant tuition fee. This has made it very difficult for most families to be able to send their children to such schools (Nyerko, 2011, Fagbamiye, 2005; Alani, 2005). In a country as Nigeria with over 70% living below the poverty line (Babalola & Isuku 2008, Fagbamiye 2005), affording such high fees-paying universities will be extremely difficult for most families. This problem constitutes a serious barrier to the goal of achieving equity of access to university education in Nigeria and consequently widens the literacy gap between the poor and the non-poor.

### **The Problem of Inadequate Finance**

The problem of insufficient finance for effective education service delivery is obvious in both public and private institutions in Nigeria. The rising cost of education provision has made both the public and private university system to seek ways of managing the school system more efficiently in an effort to achieve the mandate of university education. Most private universities lack the financial strength to effectively carry out their full obligations as the running of university education is highly capital-intensive. However, in Nigeria, the financing of university education by government is mainly limited to public universities as the private university is fully responsible for providing the needed funds to run their universities while government role to private universities is restricted to quality control. Since operating university education is a capital intensive service, most private universities are unable to generate sufficient funds to guarantee a more suitable university education for the growing number of eligible population.

### **The Problem of Inadequate Facilities**

The problem of inadequate facilities in most of the private universities in the country is another major challenge plaguing private university development in Nigeria. Most of the private universities (except for some few ones), do not have the type of facilities that are needed for modern university education. The author's personal experience as a former employee of a typical private university in the country confirms this argument. For instance, some of the universities in most cases do not have the required chemicals in laboratories where science courses are offered, while some offering engineering and related courses lack the basic equipment to guarantee quality knowledge of the course.

### **Inadequate Quality of Teaching and Research Personnel**

One of the greatest challenges facing most private universities in Nigeria as a country today is that of inadequate qualified teaching manpower. Most private universities are dependent on adjunct or retired professors with little or no strength to be productive. In addition to this, most of the few lecturers available in these private universities are either first degree holders of at best postgraduate students with little or no knowledge of teaching and research. This has grave consequence for the quality of students being produced from these

private universities. Although some national dailies have reported the increased number of "first class graduates" from some of these institutions, it is however ironic that most academic programmes of these universities hardly meet the NUC quality control measure in terms of human, physical and material resources in the universities. Hence many of the universities most times fail to meet the NUC accreditation criteria (NUC, Monday Bulletin, 2010)

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PRIVATE UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.**

In view of the enormous challenges facing private university development in the country, the following suggestions are made to improve the system.

1. **Provision of financial Support by governments:** The financial base of private university providers can be improved through government's financial support to these universities in order to compliment these institutions' financial base. This could go a long way in helping these institutions to improve their capacity. Private universities help to absorb prospecting university candidates who are unable to gain admission to the public institutions due to inadequate or limited space thereby reducing social tension in the country as most youth who could not get access to the university may be frustrated and could be tempted to be engaged in negative vices as cultism and drug addiction among others (see world bank, 2009). The financial support by government to these institutions will be helpful in helping these institutions to expand access and improve quality of university education at a lower cost.
2. **Provision of Loan Facility to the hitherto poor and eligible Students:** Due to the high rate of poverty in the country, most families could not afford to send their children to private universities due to exorbitant fees charged by these private institutions. It would go a long way if governments could create low-or interest-free loan facilities to eligible candidates from poor income backgrounds seeking admission to these universities. This will enable this category of candidates have access to the hitherto very costly private universities in the country thereby closing the gap between the rich and the poor.
3. **Provision of tax-free Incentives to Private Providers of University education:** In order to encourage massive involvement of private

sectors in the provision of university education to the growing number of the prospecting university candidates, private providers of university education could be given tax holiday to enable them conserve some funds that can be used to provide additional facilities needed to increase access and improve both the quality and quantity of teaching learning in private universities.

4. **Provision of Scholarship to deserving Students from poor Families:** As in the case of loan facility, access to private universities could be improved through government direct sponsorship in the form of scholarship to deserving students from poor families. In this way, students from poor homes who would have been unable to afford the high fees charged by these private universities would be able to have access to these private universities, thereby improving equity and hence increasing the number of potential human capital needed in the economy.
5. **Allowing Private University Operators to Source for Public Funds:** The country's private university owners could be allowed to source for fund from the capital market through the sales of shares for public subscription in the stock exchange market. This will enable private institutions to improve their revenue source through the capital market. With an increased revenue base, private university providers would be able to plough such funds to meet the various needs in the institutions. Moreover, managers of such universities would become more accountable to the various subscribers who all together have a stake in the progress and success of the institutions

### CONCLUSION

The interest of government in the provision of university education can be buttressed by private sector provision of education. In most developing countries like Nigeria, government owned universities have limited resources to solely maintain and sustain the provision of the needed facilities that would guarantee an appropriate learning environment for the provision of the needed human capital (Isuku, 2007). Apart from the problem of responding to the growing demand for university education, maintaining an adequate quality of education in the country also constitute a serious challenge to publicly-owned university.

Thus, the role of the private providers of university education for effective human capital development cannot be overstretched

Private universities should therefore be encouraged by all stakeholders in the education system (governments, parents and other users of university products) to provide the necessary support in the provision of the needed quality manpower for the labour market and consequently for socio-economic advancement of the country. This could be achieved through appropriate and relevant policies that would enhance the growth of private university in the country.

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