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**Private Higher Education and Public Policy in Africa**  
A Contrasting Case of Nigeria and Botswana

**PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION AND PUBLIC POLICY IN AFRICA:**  
*A CONTRASTING CASE OF NIGERIA AND BOTSWANA*

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## **CHAPTER ONE GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### **Why should Public Policy care about Private Higher Education?**

Private higher education is relatively an unknown subject to many people. This is particularly so in Africa with a long history of public ownership of higher education institutions. For many decades after independence, the ownership of universities in Africa was exclusively that of the state. In many African countries also, the existence of private universities was considered repugnant due mainly for ideological reasons, as they were considered largely expensive, exploitative and elitist. To some extent therefore, private universities were unpopular in many African countries for different considerations such as cost, social equity, exploitation, perceived poor academic standards and low quality services, among others.

To some people, private higher education is not an important subject to attract their attention. To some others, the nature and role of private higher education are completely unknown to them to attract any attention as a subject of interest. And even among higher education researchers, the focus has been on public higher education largely because it was the popular trend they could not run away from. This neglect has therefore created a situation where the subject of private higher education remained forgotten for years in many African countries. The situation was not helped at all because public policy in many African countries many years after independence, remained hostile to the emergence and sustenance of private higher education be they private universities, private polytechnics, private colleges of education, or private post-secondary vocational and technical institutes, among others. However, things have changed in the last two decades following a public policy shift in many African countries.

The current supportive policy environment raises the question as to why public policy should care about private higher education? But before answering the question, what do we mean by the word 'care'? The word 'care' is operationalized here to mean registering, licensing, accrediting, regulating, monitoring, and more importantly supporting private higher education institutions in ways that can promote their growth and quality over time. By private higher education, we simply refer to that aspect of higher education, which is driven primarily by private entrepreneurial initiatives rather than by the state. They include private universities, private polytechnics and monotronics, private colleges of education, church-owned seminaries for the training of priests, post-secondary technical and vocational institutions especially the Information and Technology-based ones, among host of other institutional types. Why should anyone care about private higher education?

The central role of knowledge in the determination of political and policy outcomes is often underestimated and at times not even recognized at all. We care about politics and what happens in politics because such determines what happens in our lives, be it in the economic, social, religious, educational, health, and other spheres of life. But politics is not always an independent factor in our lives. Some times what happens in politics is determined by some other factors. Although politics is driven by the need to achieve certain interests through choices that are made, interest itself is driven by knowledge, which is acquired through education. Knowledge is therefore key to the quality of judgment and choices that are made by politicians in the political arena. Policy outputs (tangible

manifestations) and policy outcomes (intended and unintended consequences that flow from the action and inaction of the government) (see Anderson, 1984) do not therefore occur in a knowledge vacuum. While it may be said that politics rules everything in society, it is right to say that knowledge or education rules politics. This point is hardly appreciated by people otherwise the educational system would not have been so badly marginalized the way it has been in many states in Africa. Sometimes the potency of education is deliberately undermined for political reasons, in order to incapacitate it from challenging the mess that goes on in politics. If knowledge is that powerful then, higher education knowledge plays a central role in the governance of society. This is one good reason people and public policy should care about private higher education.

In many parts of the world, where access into public higher education institutions proved to be difficult, the emergence of private higher education institutions played a key role in solving the problem. Many people in the world today would not have had access into quality higher education if not for private higher education institutions. Again in many parts of the world, private higher education is in the forefront of providing differentiated educational functions in multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-racial societies in ways that preserve mono- and multi-cultural values of societies. These are other good reasons why public policy and people should care about private higher education.

But more importantly, public policy should care about private higher education because historically they were forerunners of higher education in the first place. For example, the Harvard University and many other prestigious universities in the United States of America were products of non-state and private entrepreneurial initiatives. Many important breakthroughs in the world came from private higher education institutions and continue to come from them. Private higher education institutions therefore play critical role in the development of any nation if given the necessary public policy support they require. This is indeed one important reason why public policy should care about private higher education. And by logical extension, this is why everyone should care about a book on private higher education in Africa.

### **Private Higher Education and Public Policy as Recurring Theme**

This book primarily focuses on the development of private higher education in two Sub-Saharan African countries namely Nigeria (in the West African sub-region) and Botswana (in the Southern African sub-region). It focuses mainly on licensed private universities in Nigeria and all registered private tertiary education institutions in Botswana. The discussion on the development of private higher education is carried out within the context of neo-liberal policies of globalization that engendered a public policy shift in these two African countries.

The role of public policy in the development or underdevelopment of private higher education has long been recognized and seriously discussed in international literature (see for example Breneman & Finn 1978; Levy 1986a, 1986b, & 1998; Geiger 1990, & 2003). Public policy as rightly defined by Dye (2003) is whatever governments choose to do or not to do, or as Anderson (1984) put it, is a purposive course of action followed by a government (set of actors) in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. It is in this context that we appreciate the immense role the state plays and can play in the development of private higher education. Put differently, by its deliberate policy actions or

inactions, the state has over history affected the existence or non-existence of private higher education in different regions of the world.

This role has been so powerful that a *public failure theory* (see Levy, 1996) emerged to explain the rise of private higher education institutions partly as a failure of public policies to address the problem of access into public higher education institutions. As Altbach, (2007) aptly put it, 'the growth of private higher education world-wide is proof that when state-supported higher education cannot provide sufficient access, other kinds of institutions will be established'. Again, in realization of its failure, the state has in many developing countries, used its policies to promote the growth of private higher education. And yet in some other countries like Nigeria during the long period of military rule, the state stifled the emergence of private higher education institutions through either its policy of non-approval of any new private higher education institution or proscription of existing ones.

The theme of public policy has therefore become an important one in any effort to explain the emergence and rise or underdevelopment of private higher education institutions in any country. For many decades now, serious efforts have been made to understand the public policy-private higher education nexus. Three decades ago, Breneman and Finn (1978) came out with an edited volume on *Public Policy and Private Higher Education*. Although the United States of America (USA) provided the empirical context, the study nevertheless raised important issues that have global relevance. One important concern raised by these editors in their introductory chapter was what they called 'The Uncertain Future'. The concern they raised thirty years ago about the future of private higher education in the United States is today, being raised in Africa. The question being asked in Africa is whether private higher education institutions (that have been growing very fast in the last decade), can stand the sustainability test in the present competitive international higher education environment. It is instructive to note that a chapter by Robert Berdahl (in Breneman and Finn's book) appropriately titled 'The Politics of State Aid' underscores the importance of politics and public policy in the future of private higher education generally and particularly in Africa.

Again the works of Levy (1986a & 1986b) later took the discussion beyond the boundaries of the United States and added theoretical value to the subject. Shortly after, Geiger (1990) examined the subject again in the context of the United States capturing the dynamics of private higher education from the point of view of mission, finance and public policy. And furthermore, two decades later, (ie after Breneman and Finn), Levy (1998) in a brief piece titled 'Public Policy and Private Higher Education' provided more global and theoretical perspectives and relevance to the subject.

But in between, (ie a decade after Breneman and Finn's publication), the theme received serious attention in Japan. For example, James & Benjamin's (1988) work on *Public Policy and Private Education in Japan*, is a good case in point, while Maruyama's (1994) title on 'The Effect of Public Subsidies to Private Universities in Japan', as well as Masateru's (2002) article on 'The Rationale behind Public Funding of Private Universities in Japan' are other good illustrative cases. Furthermore, Tilak (1999) underscored how a public policy shift in India (following the implementation of a World Bank-rooted structural adjustment policy) led to the privatization of higher education. Again Geiger (2003) added another theoretical perspective to the theme within the policy context of the Chinese modernizing economy.

And in the context of Africa, Eisemon (1992) specifically examined the theme of *Private Initiatives and Traditions of State Control in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The role of the State in setting the parameters within which private higher education institutions operate in Africa was underscored. In Africa still, scholars from the Republic of South Africa added specific country value to the subject. In this category, works by Mabizela, Subotzky & Thaver (2000), and Coombe (2001) are good examples.

From this brief review and background, it is clear that the theme public policy and private higher education cannot be ignored in any discussion of the state and future of private higher education institutions in Africa. It appears that in each passing decade, the subject receives serious attention in the literature both nationally and internationally. The subject has therefore become a recurring theme for scholars. One major reason for this is the dynamic nature and shifting ideology of public policies at both the national and international levels. In the last two decades for example, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the forces of capitalist globalization have been major drivers of this shifting public policies in many countries of the world. In the 80s and beyond, the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank/IMF had profound influence on the ideological content and direction of public policies in many African countries. In the past decade for instance, many African countries have had major policy shifts. Nigeria and Botswana are among African countries where the shift in public policies gave rise to the emergence of private higher education. The focus on these two countries therefore is an effort to understand the dynamics of private higher education system within the context of the public policy shift in Africa.

### **Private Higher Education as a Fast Growing Industry in Nigeria and Botswana**

Private higher education industry is increasingly and steadily growing in the continent of Africa in line with the global trend, which Altbach (1998 & 2000) had predicted a decade ago. And about half a decade ago, Altbach and Levy (2003) again confirmed that private higher education is the fastest growing sector in much of the world. Nigeria and Botswana - though late entrants into the industry - are good illustrative examples of this fast growing phenomenon. In practical terms, both countries liberalized their higher education industry within the last decade – Nigeria in 1999 and Botswana in 2006. And ever since the implementation of the liberalization policy, the rapid development in the private higher education sub-sector perfectly fits into what Mabizela, Levy & Otieno (2007) aptly described as private surge amid public dominance in the provision of higher education in Africa.

Although Nigeria is a late starter in the development of private higher education due mainly to the prolonged period of military dictatorship, there has nevertheless been a rapid growth in the number of private universities during the nearly one decade of the implementation of the liberalization policy (1999-2008). Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa (with a population 140 million - 2007 official statistics) has over the years been witnessing huge demands on its higher education system. Unfortunately like in most other places in Africa, public higher education institutions were unable to meet such huge demands. And as a result, an increasing number of applications for the establishment of private universities have continued to be submitted by private higher education entrepreneurs to the National Universities Commission (NUC), a federal government regulatory agency for both public and private universities.

As at December 2007, the NUC had registered and licensed 34 private universities, many of which are now in operation. Yet this seemingly high number is insignificant when compared to those whose applications are still waiting to be considered by the NUC. And at some point in time, there were well over 100 such applications waiting to be considered by the NUC. Again, the polytechnic tertiary education sub-sector is not left out in this fast growing education business. There have been many applications made to the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), a federal government regulatory agency for the polytechnics and monotchnics. As at August 2008, the NBTE had licensed 12 private polytechnics that are already operational in the country.

Despite the rising number of private higher educational institutions registered and licensed so far, which in our humble opinion is encouraging, many private education entrepreneurs are impatient with the licensing process. For example, some prospective private entrepreneurs had gone ahead to establish 'universities' and admit students even without seeking and obtaining the necessary approval. Many are now operating illegally without approval from the NUC. But the NUC is alive to its responsibility in this regard. Consequently, in August 2008, it announced that there were 33 illegal private universities existing in Nigeria. The NUC declared them illegal and warned members of the public that such educational institutions were not approved to operate in Nigeria (Ogunyemi, 2008). The list, which we have closely studied, reveals that 9 (27%) of the 33 illegal universities had cross-border roots. Specifically, those coming from the United Kingdom were 5, while those coming from the United States of America were 2. Also, one illegal institution came from Ghana, while another one came from the Republic of Benin. It is clear that the pressure mounted by private higher educational entrepreneurs for approval by the NUC is high to the extent that they were ready to disobey the laws of the land to operate illegally. This is one challenge that this fast growing industry faces to regulatory authorities in Africa.

The case of Botswana is almost the same with respect to the growing pressure for registration. Since the commencement of the registration of private tertiary institutions in 2006 by the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) - Botswana's regulatory agency for all public and private tertiary institutions – there have been an increasing number of applications from private tertiary education entrepreneurs. As at 2007, the TEC had registered 5 private tertiary educational institutions that are now in operation. Again like in Nigeria, there is increasing pressure for registration. But unlike in Nigeria, those seeking for registration are not claiming to be or calling themselves universities, which they are not in the first place. And again, many of these institutions in Botswana are legally operating and running courses with the approval of the Botswana Training Authority (BOTA), which is a regulatory agency for institutions that offer diploma and certificate level programmes as against the TEC that regulates mainly degrees and some diploma level courses in cases where an institution runs (or has intention to run) both diploma and degree programmes.

Interestingly in the case of Botswana, there is already in existence a body called Botswana Association of Private Schools (BAPS). As the name suggests, the intention and aspirations of this body appear modest, as they are not calling themselves private tertiary schools or universities. This partly explains the concerns of the TEC when the secretary general of BAPS publicly said that they have some 200 private tertiary institutions as members, which the TEC is refusing to register. For the TEC, these are not tertiary institutions but private schools which are outside the mandate of the TEC. Unlike Nigeria,

Botswana uses the name 'tertiary' for its regulatory agency and the matter is compounded with the existence of BOTA which is also a regulatory agency mainly for training rather than for purely educational purposes. Unlike Nigeria, where there are separate regulatory agencies for the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, Botswana has a single regulatory agency the TEC, which is confronted with applications from all types of educational and specific job training entrepreneurs such as those the TEC said are merely private schools that have nothing to do with its mandate.

### **Private Higher Education: An Emerging and Growing Field of Study in Nigeria and Botswana**

The growing interest to set up new private universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Botswana has equally ignited some research interests among scholars within and outside Africa. A lot of debates are currently going on mainly in the national newspapers concerning the desirability or otherwise of private higher education institutions in many African countries. There are also a lot of debates concerning the quality and sustainability of the already established ones. Issues about the high level of fees charged by private higher education institutions have equally raised a lot of concerns in the national dailies. With such flourishing interests and debates in the national dailies, researchers cannot afford to watch such fertile grounds waste away. Consequently, there is a growing interest among researchers within and outside Africa on this infant private higher education industry. Researchers are keen to understand the dynamics of the young private higher education industry in Africa. For example, the issue of how the private higher education institutions are developing, surviving or coping under sometimes, difficult anti-globalization, and anti-liberalization policy hostility, would definitely be of significant interest to researchers within and outside Africa.

In the case of Nigeria, this growing interest is understandable given Nigeria's population figure of 140 million and the ever-increasing demands for admission spaces on existing institutions. Presently, research into private higher education in Nigeria is at its infancy although the interest is equally growing fast like the industry itself. There has not been a lot done towards understanding Nigeria's young private higher education industry, particularly for the interest of scholars at the international level. One of the initial efforts at understanding the development of private higher education in Nigeria since their emergence in 1999 was an article by this author in the Fall edition of *International Higher Education*, (see Obasi, 2006). This entry was the first on Nigeria in this prestigious scholarly outlet. Another serious attempt by this author appeared in the special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, (Obasi, 2007a). And given the paucity of literature on Nigeria on this subject therefore, this book is no doubt a welcome development. It remains a modest effort to capture the dynamics of Nigeria's private higher education industry in its one decade of existence.

With respect to Botswana, the story is the same as developments in this industry is still at an infant stage. Again, one of the initial modest efforts at capturing the background leading to the emergence of private tertiary institutions in Botswana was done by this author in yet another entry into the Winter edition of *International Higher Education*, (see Obasi, 2007b). The article recognized the influence of globalization on the emergence of new tertiary education policy in Botswana. One of the significant developments arising from the policy shift was the registration of private tertiary institutions. The new policy, which later received the approval of Botswana Parliament in April 2008, has given further legitimacy to the

liberalization drives of the government in the tertiary education industry. As a follow up to this development, this author presented a seminar paper on private higher education development in Botswana in September 2007 under the umbrella of the University of Botswana's Tertiary Education Research Seminar Series (TERS). Since then, the author has been following developments in Botswana's young private tertiary education industry. It is on the basis of this that the author decided to put the product of these pioneering efforts as part of a country case study in this book.

### **Neo-Liberalism and Globalization: The Policy Context of Private Higher Education Development**

Since private higher education flourishes mostly under a policy environment of a free market ideology, and very much so under globalization in this contemporary era, it is germane to discuss briefly (as part of the introduction), the concepts neo-liberalism and globalization. This is important because much of the world today is ruled by the forces of the market under the powerful driving influence of globalization.

The term globalization came into common usage in the early 1990s, following the decline of Marxism, the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Kurth (2001). As Kurth rightly observed, the combination of these three factors meant the absence of 'any formidable ideological and political competitor to liberal democracy and the free market'. The end of the Socialist or Second World he further said, meant that the Capitalist or First World could expand into the entire globe, hence 'globalization'. And also in the 1990s he pointed out, 'new information technologies reached the critical mass where they became an entire information economy'.

Globalization refers to 'the growing interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world through increased flows of goods, services, capital, people and information. The process is driven by technological advances and reductions in the costs of international transactions, which spread technology and ideas, raise the share of trade in the world production and increase the mobility of capital' (DFID, 2000). Hence according to Stiglitz (2003), globalization is 'the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world, which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders'.

Globalization has come to be closely associated with neo-liberal capitalism, which is characterized *inter alia* by (a) the rule by the market; (b) privatization of state industries and services; (c) trade and agricultural liberalization; (d) cutting public expenditure for social services as well as their marketization and elimination of the concept of public good, (e) deregulation, including the labour market as well as 'flexibilization' of the wage relations; and (f) educational reforms geared to job training rather than to citizenship building (see Martinez and Garcia, 2000; Santos, 2001). Neo-liberalism is traceable to what Williamson (1990) called the 'Washington Consensus', a phrase he first coined to refer to a summary of the lowest common denominator of policy advice addressed by the Washington-based institutions (including the World Bank) to Latin American countries as of 1989. But as Williamson later came to observe, the phrase *Washington Consensus* has come to mean neo-liberal or market-fundamentalist policies (see Williamson, 2000). The subsequent championing of the *Washington Consensus* by the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organizations (WTO) has ushered in a new controversial era of



capitalist globalization where educational services are being redefined as marketable commodities in many countries.

### **The Structure of the Book**

This book is divided into five major parts consisting of 18 chapters. The division into parts was necessary to make the clustering of related chapters into broad sub-themes possible, as the book focuses on two different countries. Part One provides the introductory and theoretical background. It is made up of two chapters with chapter 1 presenting the general introduction, which *inter alia* discusses the issue of private higher education and public policy as a recurring subject. Chapter 2 examines the nature, types, and growth of private higher education. Part Two presents the African and global overview of private higher education. It is also made up of two chapters namely 3 and 4. Chapter 3 examines the state of private higher education in Africa, while chapter 4 discusses the global overview of private higher education development.

Part Three focuses on private higher education in Nigeria. It is made up of seven chapters starting with chapter 5 that looks at the issue of public policy and private higher education development and underdevelopment. Chapter 6 discusses the history and development of private higher education in Nigeria, while chapter 7 focuses on the debate on the desirability and growth of private universities in Nigeria. Then chapter 8 examines the emerging features of Nigerian private universities, while 9 focuses on the sustainability of private universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, chapter 10 discusses the role of the NUC in quality assurance in private universities. And then chapter 11 closes the discussion on Nigeria with the debate on public funding of private higher education.

Part Four focuses on private higher education in Botswana and it is made up of five chapters. It begins with chapter 12 that deals with Botswana's new tertiary education policy. Then chapter 13 examines the emergence and features of private tertiary institutions in Botswana. Chapter 14 takes a look at government sponsorship in Botswana, while chapter 15 examines the gains, challenges and sustainability of private tertiary education institutions in Botswana. The last chapter on Botswana (chapter 16) discusses the role of TEC in quality assurance in private tertiary institutions.

Finally Part Five presents a contrasting case study, with chapter 17 comparing both Nigeria and Botswana on selected indicators such as enrollment, ownership profile, quality and number of academic staff, governance structure, among others. Finally, chapter 18 presents the summary and conclusion on public policy and private higher education in Africa.

### ***Explanatory Notes on Methodology: Citation of Newspapers and Websites***

The research that produced this book took more than five years of observation, tracking and updating of daily and weekly issues on private higher education in Nigeria and Botswana. More importantly, the weekly newspaper articles in my column on higher education in two national newspapers in Nigeria provided the raw and initial data from which the first draft of the manuscript began. Given the fact that some of the relevant newspaper clippings were in Nigeria and could not be easily located when I needed them most while in Botswana, I experienced some difficulties making full references on some of the borrowed ideas.